CHAPTER 2

India's Long Road to Independence

Our ideal is that of Swaraj or absolute autonomy free from foreign control. We claim the right of every nation to live its own life by its own energies according to its own nature and ideals. We reject the claim of aliens to force upon us a civilisation inferior to our own or to keep us out of our inheritance on the untenable ground of a superior fitness.

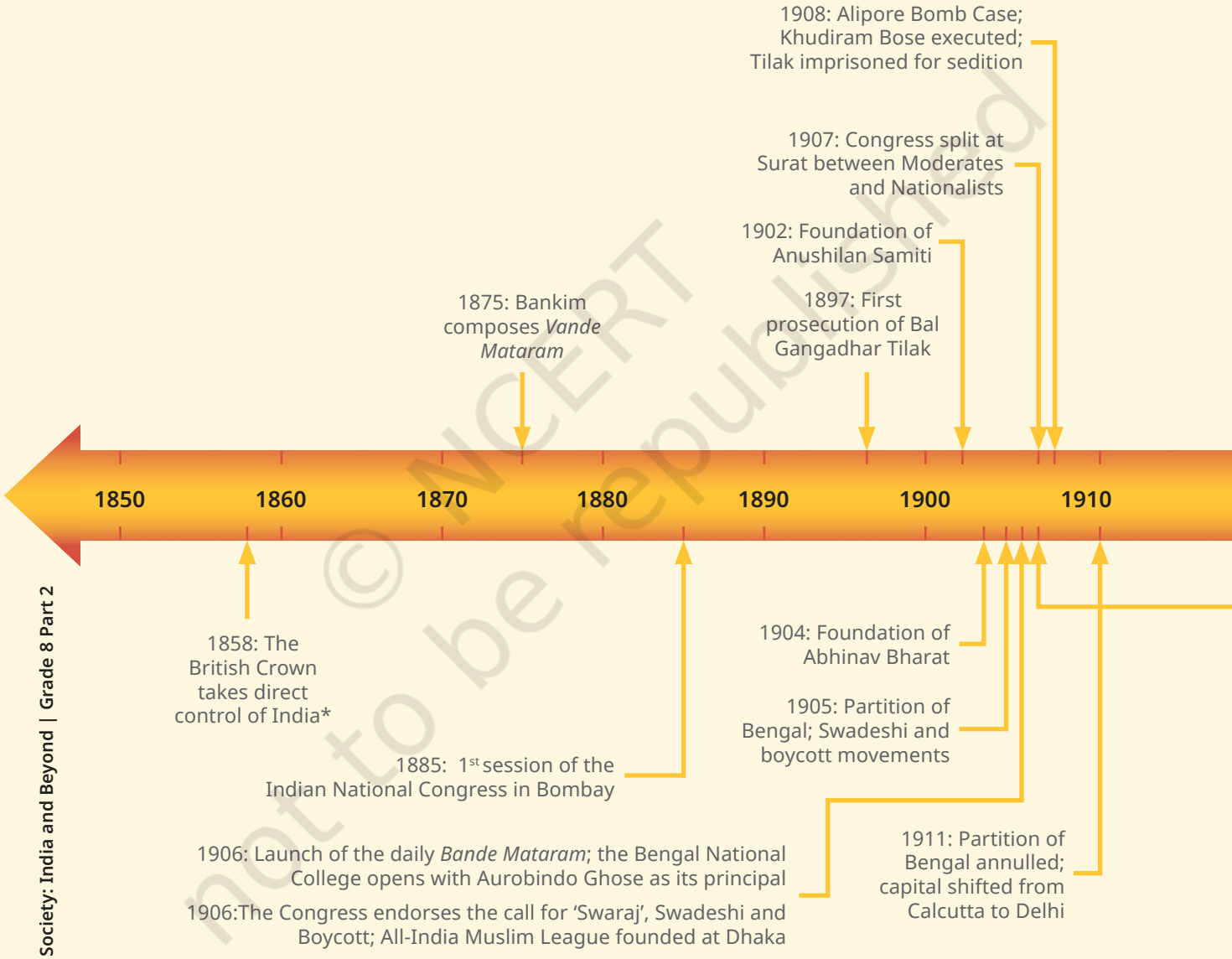
— Sri Aurobindo (1909)

Fig. 2.1. A procession of women in Bombay during the 1942 Quit India Movement.



The Big Questions ?

1. *How did a land of diverse geographies, languages and religions come together to challenge and finally end nearly two centuries of British rule?*



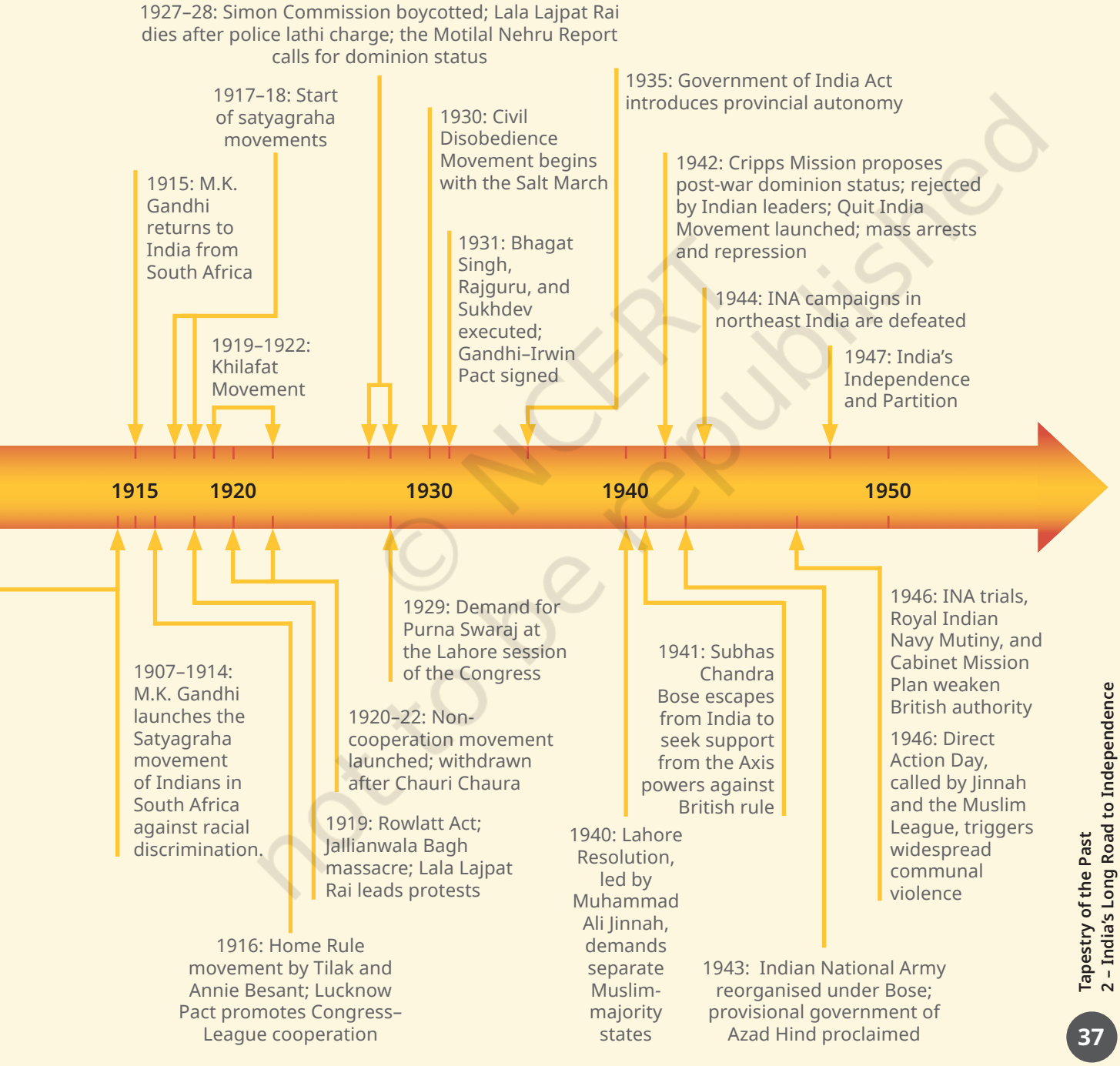
* You have already studied about a few pre-1857 resistances against British rule in Part 1 of this textbook. You can visit the QR code and see the location of several such resistances given in the map.

Fig. 2.2.

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2. *What were the main developments and who were some important figures in India's struggle for freedom?*
3. *What issues did the leading freedom fighters agree or disagree upon?*

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Imagine a land where people spoke hundreds of different languages, had different faiths, and followed many different customs — yet, together, these people challenged the most powerful empire in the world. Such is the story of India's long road to freedom: a story not just of battles and protests, but of ideas, dreams, and the courage to imagine a new nation.

This chapter is a brief account of India's long road to independence. The full story would take many books to tell, with countless events — attempted reforms, repressive actions, meetings, speeches, protests, uprisings, tales of heroic deeds — and millions of Indians who endured hardship and suffering for this cause, often at the cost of their lives. Indeed, years ago, the Indian Council of Historical Research published a five-volume *Dictionary of* ***Martyrs*** listing some 14,000 heroes and heroines of India's struggle for freedom. We cannot possibly mention even a fraction of them here! Behind the few you will encounter stand many more, from every part of India, and we hope you will get to discover some of them either in further studies or in your life explorations. Let us make it clear, therefore, that freedom fighters not mentioned here are no less important than the few who illustrate our story.

Martyr: A person who is killed or tortured for his or her beliefs

We should also keep in mind that although all those who fought for India's freedom shared the same objective, they often differed in the ways to achieve it. Historians have studied those different approaches and schools of thought among the freedom fighters; we will only highlight a few of those debates.



LET'S EXPLORE

Talk to your grandparents or elderly family members and find out what they remember or heard about India's freedom struggle. Note which leaders or methods people supported. Discuss in class how, despite sharing the same goal of freedom, people followed different paths.

A Royal Proclamation

In Part 1 of this textbook, we witnessed the tragic events of the Great Uprising of 1857. The next year, the British Crown under

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Queen Victoria took direct control of India from the East India Company. The territories of British India were now governed in the Queen's name by the Secretary of State for India (based in London) and the Viceroy — the Queen's representative, based in India and also known as 'Governor General'.



LET'S REMEMBER

Let's go back to the map of the British Indian Empire in Part 1 of this textbook (Fig. 4.16). Observe the different colours; recall that the red and pink territories are those directly under British administration, while the yellow ones are the princely states.

In 1858, too, a 'royal proclamation' was issued in Victoria's name, promising to respect 'the rights, dignity and honour of native Princes', which means that some 560 Indian princes would continue to rule their own states, but under British supremacy, or 'paramountcy' as it was called. The proclamation also assured the 'natives of our Indian territories' that they would be taken care of just like 'all our other subjects' and that there would be no attempt to impose Christianity on any of them.

Such promises intended to convey the message that the colonial masters would now prefer to rule in peace than through military force. But, of course, none of those assurances were respected in practice. The princely states remained closely monitored. In almost all of them, the colonial powers posted a 'Resident' or 'Political Agent', who very often interfered in the government and administration of the princely states, reducing their supposed autonomy to a symbolic one. Christian missionary activity continued with indirect state support (through concessions of urban land, for instance) and, often, with open encouragement from British high officials.

The economic exploitation of India, which we saw in Part 1 of this textbook, continued; heavy land taxes resulted in several severe famines and widespread discontent, particularly among peasants and tribals. Local industries could not compete with cheap British-manufactured goods flooding the markets.

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As regards India's 'native subjects', they were always treated as inferior to the British, as they were regarded as belonging to 'inferior races', with the white race asserting that it was destined to dominate the world. For example, those employed in the army, civil services or universities would have a lesser pay than British employees in the same posts; most juries in courts would have a majority of British members and would be lenient towards crimes committed by Europeans against 'natives'; in clubs, trains, specific areas of cities and some public spaces, Indians would not be allowed to mix with Europeans. In 1878, an 'Arms Act' was passed, which prohibited Indians from keeping arms, but allowed the British to do so. The same year, a 'Vernacular Press Act' was passed, which regulated and censored the Indian-language press. And so on.

Reform Movements

While British rule brought sweeping changes to governance and set off intense debates within Indian society, members of India's elite often looked up to Europe as a model to 'modernise' India. Indian reformers also took note of European models while challenging the widespread lack of formal education or social practices such as child marriage, the degraded status of widows or caste-based discrimination.



Fig. 2.3. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay

The table on the facing page provides a glimpse of a few reformers and their movements. There were many more across India.

Other Influences

Before we move to the political front, let us pause to examine two different examples of cultural currents that would play a part in the rise of nationalist feelings.

In the 1860s, **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay** (or Chatterjee) was a sub-magistrate in a district of Bengal. He met with success through popular novels in Bengali, which dealt with themes of

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Reform movement	Founder / leader	Year & place	Key ideas and contributions
Brahmo Samaj (earlier Brahmo Sabha)	**Raja Ram Mohan Roy**	1828, Calcutta	Opposed child marriage and caste discrimination. Supported widow rights and girls' education. Promoted a monotheistic interpretation of Hinduism. Favoured English education. Later weakened due to internal disagreements.
Arya Samaj	**Swami Dayananda Saraswati**	1875, Bombay	Emphasised return to the Vedas, rational thinking, equality and self-reliance. Opposed ritualism and birth-based caste. Supported women's education and widow remarriage. Inspired many later freedom fighters in north India.
Shuddhi Movement	**Arya Samaj leaders**	Late 19th century	Aimed to reconvert people who had left Hinduism. Encouraged social pride, debates, and education.
Other reformers	**Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Syed Ahmed Khan, Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule**	19th century	Promoted modern education, especially for girls and marginalised groups. Challenged caste-based discrimination and gender inequality. Opened schools and supported social reform.

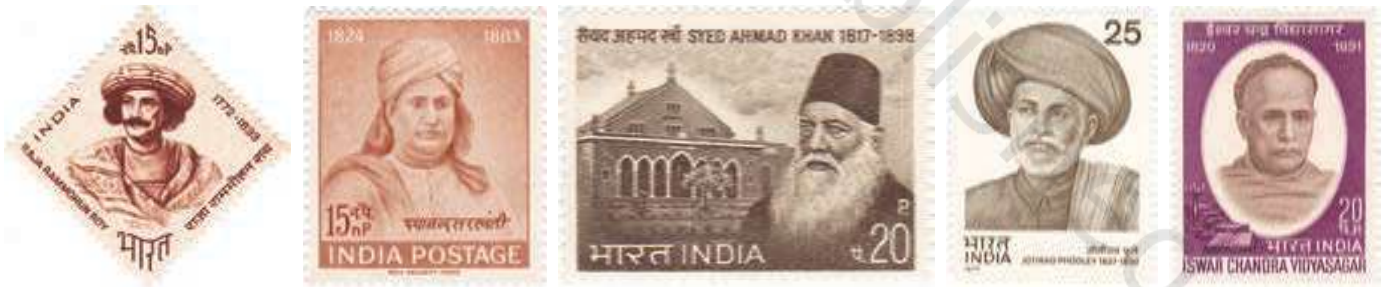


Fig. 2.4. Postage stamps honouring Raja Rammohun Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Syed Ahmad Khan, Jyotirao Phule, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar

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romance and Indian history. They were among the first any Indian language. In 1882, he published *Anandamath*, a novel set amid the Sannyasi Rebellion (remember the chapter 'The Colonial Era in India') and the 1770 famine that devastated Bengal. In the novel, sannyasis worshipped the motherland as the divine mother and, in a key scene, recited the poem, *Bande Mataram*, which became a rallying cry and a mantra during the 1905 awakening. It also invoked spiritual and cultural pride from India's past for the cause of freedom, as we will see below.



DON'T MISS OUT

Though the novel *Anandamath* was published in 1882, the poem *Bande Mataram* was composed earlier, in 1875. Its title is a Bengali version of the Sanskrit '*Vande Mātaram*', literally 'Praise to the Mother' or 'I bow to the Motherland'. (Note that there is no letter '*va*' in Bengali, only '*ba*'.)

Rabindranath Tagore set the poem to music and sang it at the 1896 Congress Session in Calcutta. In 1950, the Constituent Assembly adopted it as India's National Song.



LET'S EXPLORE

Below are the first two stanzas of the song. Can you make out some of their meaning?

Vande mātaram!
sujalām suphalām malayajaśhītalām
śhasyaśhyāmalām, mātaram!
Vande mātaram!

Śubhrajyotsnām pulakitayāminīm
phullakusumita drumadalaśhobhinīm
suhāsinīm sumadhura bhāṣhiṇīm
sukhadām varadām, mātaram!
Vande mātaram!



Fig. 2.5. A 1976 postage stamp with the lyrics of national song, 'Vande Mātaram'.

Born in 1863, Narendranath Datta studied Western literature, history and philosophy, as well as ancient Indian texts and

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classical Indian music. He also practised several sports. At the age of 18, he met Sri Ramakrishna and ultimately became a prominent disciple of his under the name of **Swami Vivekananda**. He travelled widely across India and, in 1893, his powerful speech in defence of India's civilisation and culture made a strong impression at Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago. He wrote and lectured extensively in America, Europe and India on spirituality, education, and national regeneration. He also founded the Ramakrishna Mission, which aimed to combine spiritual practice with social service.



Fig. 2.6. Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda did not involve himself in political action; instead, he exhorted Indians to discover their inner strength and overcome fear, weakness, and self-doubt. His call to "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached" urged self-confidence and action. He encouraged the cultivation of science (he once advised Jamsetji Tata to create a research institute, which eventually became the Indian Institute of Science). At the same time, he rejected blind imitation of the West and encouraged Indians to go back to the ancient roots of Indian spirituality: "... Out of the past is built the future. Look back, therefore, as far as you can, drink deep of the eternal fountains that are behind, and after that, look forward, march forward, and make India brighter, greater, much higher than she ever was." His short life of 39 years had a profound impact, and many freedom fighters drew inspiration from him. His birthday (12 January) is observed in India as National Youth Day.

LET'S EXPLORE

How are the values expressed by Swami Vivekananda above relevant in the 21st century? Can some of them help you achieve your goals? Share your thoughts with your classmates.



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The Rise of the Indian National Congress

About the same time, another movement was quietly growing on the political front.

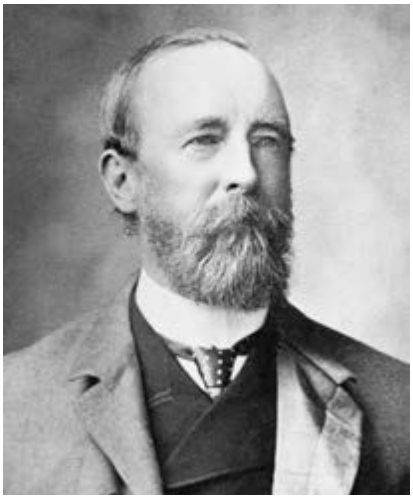


Fig. 2.7. Allan Octavian Hume

As unrest continued in several parts of India, regional attempts to form associations of citizens met with limited success. Though a British officer, Allan Octavian Hume had become critical of the colonial policies, pointing to them as the cause of poverty in India; this did not go down well with the authorities. Ultimately, he resigned in 1882 and worked to bring together a group of like-minded Indians. 1885 saw the launch of the **Indian National Congress** with its first session in Bombay. Along with Hume, Dadabhai Naoroji, then a prominent advocate (whom we met in the chapter 'The Colonial Era in India'), Womesh Chunder Bonnerjee, who was elected as the first president, played leading roles. Seventy-two delegates from diverse regions and religions attended, mostly drawn from Anglicised upper classes of society.

The Indian National Congress (often referred to as just 'Congress') began as a forum that expressed its full faith in the 'providential character' of British rule in India and its 'unswerving allegiance to the British Crown'. It held yearly sessions in different cities, passing resolutions that called for a dialogue with the colonial powers. The Congress reasoned that if it could obtain a greater Indian participation in governance, protection of civil rights, and some social and economic reforms, the growing discontent among the Indian 'subjects' would subside. As it happened, the colonial government largely ignored the Congress's resolutions, granting only minor concessions and denying Indians any meaningful participation in governance.

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Growing Discontent

As a result, discontent kept growing in the post-1857 period. We will only mention a few examples here.

In the 1860s and early 1870s, **Baba Ram Singh** took up and amplified in Punjab the socio-religious and political movement known as the **Kuka Movement**, also called the **Namdhari Movement**. 'Namdhari' means "those who uphold the name of God," reflecting the movement's emphasis on spiritual discipline and moral purity. Its followers were called Kukas because of the high-pitched chants (called *kūks*) that they emitted during their devotional prayers.



Fig. 2.8. A 19th-century painting of a Namdhari or Kuka Sikh

The movement worked to improve Sikh society by putting a stop to female infanticide and child marriage, and promoting simplified marriage rituals to end the dowry system. Long before this became a national strategy, the Kukas challenged British rule by rejecting foreign goods, wore simple hand-spun white clothes, and established their own independent postal system and private courts to avoid British institutions.

The Kukas also strongly opposed cow slaughter, which was conducted in slaughterhouses sanctioned or established by the colonial government, sometimes deliberately close to gurdwaras. In 1872, tensions peaked after a group of Kukas attacked some of these slaughterhouses. The British response was brutal: 65 Kukas were executed without trial, many by being tied to the mouths of cannons and blown away. Baba Ram Singh was arrested and exiled to Burma, where he passed away in captivity, never to return home. Despite this suppression, the Kuka Movement left a legacy of courage and self-reliance and remains a forerunner of the later mass boycott movements.

In western Maharashtra, a severe famine was followed by an outbreak of bubonic plague (an infectious and often fatal disease) in 1896. The authorities' harsh measures to control the epidemic

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Fig. 2.9. Bal Gangadhar Tilak

were resented. The following year, the three **Chapekar brothers** shot dead the British Plague Commissioner of Poona (present-day Pune) and a British military officer; they were betrayed, arrested and hanged.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a founding member of the Indian National Congress found its leaders too moderate and wrote strongly against the colonial oppression in his Marathi newspaper, *Kesari*. A powerful orator, he turned the traditional Ganesh Chaturthi (festival celebrating the Lord Gaṇeśha) and the Shivaji festival into popular events, using religious and patriotic symbols to send message that people needed to be awaken, stand up and resist the oppression. However, Tilak was charged with having published **seditious** articles which incited violence; although there was no evidence, he was sentenced to 18 months' rigorous imprisonment. A national hero, he came to be known as 'Lokmanya' or 'revered by the people'. He interpreted and translated the Bhagavad Gita to Marathi later published in English bearing the title *The Gita Rahasya*.

Seditious: Promoting sedition or rebellion against the authority of a state or monarch

About that time, a few secret societies and revolutionary groups were formed in western India; Tilak was very likely in touch with some of them. In Bengal, the **Anushilan Samiti** was set up in 1902, with centres in numerous towns and villages to provide intellectual, moral and physical training to young men. **Aurobindo Ghose**, then residing in Baroda (presently Vadodara), tried to coordinate its action with the help of his brother, Barindra Kumar Ghose (also known as Barin Ghose). Tilak was also very closely associated with V.D. Savarkar's Abhinav Bharat.

Let us travel to eastern India. **Birsa Munda,** from the Munda tribe (in the Chota Nagpur region of present-day Jharkhand, then under the Bengal Presidency) emerged as a fearless leader who galvanised tribal resistance against British exploitation, oppressive landlords and inroads by Christian missionaries.

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Asserting that he would restore tribal faith, rights and dignity, Birsa became a prophet of tribal revival.

In 1899–1900, Birsa led a widespread uprising known as 'Ulgulaan' or the Great Tumult, mobilising tribal communities to reject colonial authority and reclaim their land. The police and some churches were attacked, prompting repression by the authorities and the brutal killing of many Mundas during an armed confrontation. Arrested in early 1900, Birsa died in jail four months later, at the age of 24. But his impact on many tribal communities of eastern India lived long and he remains a revered figure today.



Fig. 2.10. Birsa Munda after his arrest in 1900

The 1905 Partition of Bengal and National Awakening

In the first years of the 20th century, George Curzon, the then viceroy of India, floated a plan to partition the Bengal presidency. India's largest presidency, it extended in those days to regions now in Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and Assam. The official motive was to put in place a more efficient administration; in reality, it was a faithful application of the colonial master's 'divide and rule' policy — in this case, a division between Bengal's largely Muslim eastern part and largely Hindu western part. The move was widely opposed.

Despite strong objections, Curzon announced the partition of Bengal in 1905. The move provoked widespread outrage, with leaders such as Rabindranath Tagore, Surendranath Banerjee, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Ashwini Kumar Dutt uniting people across communities to resist what they saw as a deliberate attack on their identity and solidarity, since, by and large, Hindus and Muslims had coexisted peacefully in Bengal.

The partition had two visible results. One, as expected, was a sharpened division between the two communities: most Muslim leaders ended up defending the partition, perhaps attracted by Curzon's promises for development in East Bengal and more administrative posts in the administration for Muslims.

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The second outcome was not part of the colonial calculations. Public meetings, processions and protest rallies multiplied in Calcutta, often joined by students; patriotic songs such as *Vande Mataram* were sung in street processions, prompting the authorities to ban its public singing. People also tied *rakhis* on each other's wrists as a symbol of unity, especially between Hindus and Muslims, to counter the British division. Such protests soon spread beyond Bengal.

At the same time, two programmes of mass actions emerged — **Swadeshi** ('of one's own country') and **boycott**. These two movements encouraged people to boycott foreign-made goods and promote Indian-made products, thereby strengthening India's own industries and reducing economic dependence on British goods, especially textiles. Bonfires of foreign goods — piles of foreign cloth, foreign sugar, etc. — were lit in the streets. Wearing clothes made of fabrics spun and woven in India became a symbol of self-reliance and national pride.

The Boycott movement went further, targeting British institutions as well, including government schools, colleges, and courts. The impact was, however, limited, as India's own institutions were not ready enough to offer a transition.



DON'T MISS OUT

The idea of Swadeshi was not exactly new; from the late 19th century, a few Indian leaders promoted self-reliance. In 1886, the industrialist **Jamsetji Tata** established the Swadeshi Mills in Bombay, which became a model of textile production. Several Swadeshi-minded Indian businessmen started the Punjab National Bank in Lahore in 1895, solely with Indian capital; the Punjabi Nationalist leader, **Lala Lajpat Rai**, was one of its founding figures and early directors. In 1901, the great Indian chemist **Prafulla Chandra Ray** founded the Bengal Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals Ltd. There are many more examples, all of them motivated by the desire to break the British monopoly in every area of the Indian economy.

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Fig. 2.11. The so-called 'Lal-Bal-Pal' trio of early Indian Nationalism: Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal

The Nationalist Agenda

In 1906, **Bipin Chandra Pal**, a prominent nationalist leader from Bengal, a man of great learning and inspiring eloquence, launched the English daily *Bande Mataram*; Aurobindo Ghose joined him and soon took charge of the publication. *Bande Mataram* spread the idea of India's freedom day by day. Here is an example (from an article of 4th September 1906):

> We objected so strongly to this measure [Bengal's Partition, because] it was professedly wanted by the Government to create a Mahomedan province with Dacca as its capital, and the evident object of it was to sow discord between the Hindus and the Mahomedans in a Province that had never known it in the whole history of the present British connection. ... This agitation is not an agitation merely against Partition ... The attainment of absolute national autonomy—it is this alone that will settle down this movement.

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Bande Mataram.
A Daily Organ of Indian Nationalism.
Swadeshi PAPER or India.
Our Policy: INDIA for Indians.
Prosecution
Babu Arabinda Ghosh
A. Das's Essence
The Athletic Score

Fig. 2.12. The front page of an issue of the Bande Mataram daily.



LET'S EXPLORE

- → Why do you think the *Bande Mataram* daily avoided using the word 'independence'?
- → Comment on the phrase 'absolute national autonomy' in the above quotation from a *Bande Mataram* article.
- → Looking at the two boxes on either side of the daily's title in Fig. 2.12, what do you observe?



Fig. 2.13. The logo of the National Council of Education launched in 1906.

The bold stand this newspaper took had a far-reaching impact. To counter the denationalising effects of English education, it added National Education to Swadeshi and boycott, and spelt out a 'doctrine of passive resistance' to resist the colonial power.

Earlier the same year, a few leading citizens joined hands to create a National Council of Education and launch the Bengal National College, which was intended to provide a genuinely Indian education. None of the modern disciplines were missing, but

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rootedness in Indian thoughts and values was a major focus. Aurobindo Ghose was asked to be the Bengal National College's first principal and steer the new institution. (It was integrated in the Jadavpur University after independence.)

This Nationalist programme got a boost in December 1906, when the Congress session at Calcutta, with Dadabhai Naoroji as president, declared Swaraj (literally, 'self-rule'), Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education to be the Congress's objective. 'Swaraj', however, was not defined — it was understood to have a range of meanings, from self-rule within the British Empire to full independence.

India as the 'Mother'

A theme often present in the speeches and writings of many Nationalists was that of 'Mother India' or 'Bharat Mata'. Partly inspired by Bankim's *Anandamath*, they saw India as a divine motherland. In 1905, at the time of Bengal's partition, the poet Abanindranath Tagore produced a painting of 'Bharat Mata'. In Madras presidency (presently Chennai), the fiery poet and freedom fighter **Subramania Bharati** not only translated *Bande Mataram* into Tamil but also composed many poems calling on the Mother India to rise. In Punjab, Lala Lajpat Rai started a publication with the title *Vande Mataram*.



Fig. 2.14. 'Bharat Mata', a painting by Abanindranath Tagore (L)
Fig. 2.15. Front cover of Subramania Bharati's magazine, 'Vijaya', portraying Mother India (R)

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LET'S EXPLORE

- → In what ways are these two representations of Mother India similar or different?
- → What details can you discern in the front cover of Subramania Bharati's *Vijaya*?

The All-India Muslim League

In the aftermath of the Swadeshi Movement, the ideal of India's liberation from the colonial yoke was steadily spreading. However, in December 1906, several prominent leaders of the Muslim community founded the **All-India Muslim League** in Dhaka with an objective of defending Muslim political interests in British India. Their concerns had been growing since the formation of the Congress, which they distrusted, as they feared that Muslims would not be adequately represented in the largely Hindu-dominated Congress. Syed Ahmad Khan, about whom we have read earlier, had campaigned against the Congress and founded the 'All India Muhammadan Educational Conference' as an alternative political platform for Muslims (1886). The Congress tried to address these concerns, however without much success.

While the All-India Muslim League aimed to protect Muslim political rights, it initially represented a limited segment of the Muslim population, primarily the elite. As we saw earlier, quite a few Muslims initially opposed the partition of Bengal. A few decades later, this division would contribute to the emergence of the Two-Nation Idea.

The 1907 Surat Split

The British authorities were understandably alarmed by the Congress's resolution at the Calcutta session, especially its call for 'Swaraj', and exerted pressure on some of the moderate Congress leaders. As a result, the next session, at Surat (Gujarat) in December 1907, witnessed efforts by these Moderates, as they were now called, to step back from the Calcutta resolutions and return to the old requests for minor administrative concessions

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and a gradual shift to self-government within the British Empire. Among them were Dadabhai Naoroji, **Gopal Krishna Gokhale** (an educationist and founder of the Servants of India Society), **Pherozeshah Mehta** (a prominent Bombay lawyer), **Surendranath Banerjee** (a journalist and political leader), and Rashbehari Ghosh (a Calcutta lawyer).

As Tilak was prevented from speaking, chaos descended on the session. The Nationalist camp, led by Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai (who was known as the 'Lion of Punjab' because of his forceful speeches and writings) and Aurobindo Ghose, had to move out and conduct their own separate session.



DON'T MISS OUT

In the first decade of the 20th century, the Moderates and the British authorities labelled those who called for nothing less than India's independence, 'Extremists' or 'Radicals'. On the other hand, this group called themselves simply 'Nationalists', as they saw nothing 'extreme' or 'radical' in the objective of an independent Indian nation.



Fig. 2.16. The Nationalists' separate session after the Surat split, with Tilak (standing) addressing the gathering and Aurobindo Ghose (seated at the table) presiding.

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The Revolutionaries

From the late 19th century onward, more and more newspapers and magazines, both in English and in Indian languages, questioned colonial policies and exposed injustices. We have mentioned *Kesari* and *Bande Mataram*. More moderate newspapers included Dadabhai Naoroji's *Voice of India* and Surendranath Banerjee's *The Bengalee*. And far more radical was *Yugantar* ('New Era'), a Bengali newspaper which preached open revolt and a violent overthrow of British rule; the paper was run by a group of revolutionaries led by Barindra and associated with the Anushilan Samiti. There were several other publications which were suppressed and shut down across India.

Late April 1908, two young members of this group, Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki, tried to assassinate a British judge, Douglas Kingsford, who had been handing down particularly severe sentences to Swadeshi activists, including flogging and long imprisonment. Khudiram and Prafulla threw bombs at a carriage they thought was carrying Kingsford, but it was two British ladies who fell victim to the blast. While Prafulla shot himself before he could be caught, Khudiram, just 18 years old, was captured, put on trial and hanged a few months later. According to reports, he was calm and smiling in his last moments. He was now a national hero, and when his funeral procession went through Calcutta, crowds kept throwing flowers on his body.

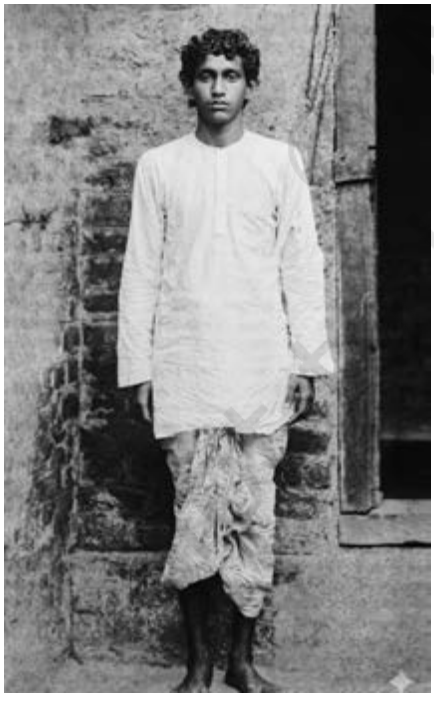


Fig. 2.17. Khudiram Bose, after his arrest

A few days after the failed attempt, Aurobindo Ghose, his brother Barindra and many more revolutionaries were arrested and imprisoned at Alipore jail, then a suburb of Calcutta. The colonial powers were now confident of silencing Aurobindo, whom they regarded as "the most dangerous man we have to deal with at present". The Alipore Bomb trial, as it has been called, went on for a year, with Aurobindo ably defended by a friend and collaborator, **Chittaranjan Das**. The whole country eagerly followed press reports

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of the arguments put forth by the prosecution and the defence. In the end, Aurobindo was acquitted, Barindra and another revolutionary were sentenced to death (commuted on appeal to life imprisonment in the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Island, but released a decade later), most others to long jail terms, and a few acquitted.

The authorities now clamped down on the Nationalist press (*Bande Mataram*, for instance, was suppressed while the Alipore trial went on). They jailed several Nationalist leaders, including Tilak, who was prosecuted for sedition because of his articles in *Kesari*. The trial, in which **Muhammad Ali Jinnah** (whom we will meet again soon) was Tilak's lawyer, was rushed and unfair — Tilak was sentenced to be jailed in Mandalay (in Myanmar) for six years. (In another sedition case, in 1916, Jinnah's defence of Tilak will be successful.)



DON'T MISS OUT

Freedom Struggle in the North-East

The Northeast India had contributed in the freedom struggle of India at different points of time. Some of the movements were prior to 1857 such as the Khasi Revolt (1829–1833) led by Tirot Sing in Meghalaya and the Singpho Rebellion (1830s–1840s), a tribal revolt against British rule in the eastern part of Assam to name a few. Maniram Dewan and Piyali Baruah were publicly hanged by the British during the 1857 rebellion in Assam. Later in the 1942 Quit India Movement a number of martyrs such as Kanak Lata Baruah and Kushal Konwar laid down their lives. Similarly, in Manipur Rani Gaidinliu started fighting against the British since the age of 13. She urged the people not to pay taxes and also not to work for colonial masters.

LET'S EXPLORE



You may explore further and find out more about the freedom struggle in the North-East and known and lesser-known freedom fighters from this area.

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Fig. 2.18. An artist's rendering of the attack on Viceroy Hardinge, published in 1913 in a French daily.



LET'S EXPLORE

When the judge asked Tilak if he had anything to say after being sentenced, Tilak replied, "There are higher powers that rule the destinies of men and nations; and I think, it may be the will of Providence that the cause I represent may be benefited more by my suffering than by my pen and tongue."

What message do you think he was trying to convey?

On another occasion, Tilak famously declared, "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it." What does this reveal about Tilak's character?

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DON'T MISS OUT

In 1910, receiving news of his impending arrest and possible deportation, Aurobindo Ghose went to Chandernagore (present-day Chandannagar), then a French settlement north of Calcutta, and from there proceeded to Pondicherry (today Puducherry), France's main settlement in India at the time, where he dedicated himself to his philosophy of spiritual evolution and 'integral yoga', writing many books and no longer taking part in political activities. He became known as 'Sri Aurobindo'.

Owing to the continuing popular sentiment against the partition of Bengal, the colonial government finally decided to withdraw it in 1911. But the damage had been done.

Meantime, violent attacks on British officials continued. To mention a few, in 1909, bombs were thrown at the Viceroy Minto's carriage in Ahmedabad during a procession, but missed their target. The same year, **Anant Kanhere**, **Krishnaji Karve** and **Vinayak Deshpande**, members of Maharashtra's **Abhinav Bharat** secret society, founded by the revolutionary **V. D. Savarkar**, shot dead a district magistrate at a theatre in Nashik; they were caught and hanged soon afterwards (Anant Kanhere was just 18). In 1911, **Vanchinathan** shot dead a district collector at a railway station near Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu; the collector had suppressed the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company founded by the Nationalist **V.O. Chidambaram Pillai**, which led to his unfair prosecution and imprisonment. And in 1912, as the Viceroy, Charles Hardinge, made his ceremonial entry into British India's new capital, Delhi, riding on an elephant, a bomb was thrown at him; while an umbrella bearer was killed, Hardinge suffered injuries, but survived; his wife was unhurt.

In 1914–15, the **Ghadar Movement** was a daring attempt by Indian revolutionaries to trigger a pan-Indian mutiny within the British Indian Army during World War I (1914–1918). Behind the movement was the Ghadar Party, founded by Indian migrants in North America, including **Lala Hardayal** and **Sohan Singh Bhakna**; many of them returned to India to take part in the rebellion. In India, **Rash Behari Bose**, Sachindra Nath Sanyal

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(also known as **Sachin Sanyal**), **Kartar Singh Sarabha**, among others, tried to get the army infiltrated. However, the British intelligence network uncovered the plot, leading to widespread arrests, imprisonments in the Cellular Jail, and the execution of several leaders, including Kartar Singh (at the age of 19) and **Vishnu Ganesh Pingle**. While the mutiny failed, it laid the groundwork for future revolutionary efforts.



Fig. 2.19. Rash Behari Bose, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Bagha Jatin, Sachin Sanyal (L to R)



DON'T MISS OUT

The **Cellular Jail** in the Andaman Islands was a huge colonial prison used by the British to exile and isolate revolutionaries, far from the mainland. Known as '**Kala Pani**' ('Black Water'), it was designed specifically for solitary confinement and used to break the spirit of freedom fighters. Prisoners faced horrific conditions, including extreme physical



Fig. 2.20. In the Cellular Jail, prisoners condemned to death were kept in this separate cell before being hanged.

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labour—such as extracting oil by hand—and brutal punishment for the slightest disobedience. A few revolutionaries who were imprisoned there, such as Barindra Ghose or V.D. Savarkar, left vivid descriptions of forced labour and ill-treatment of the prisoners. Many of them died and some lost their sanity. Those who tried to escape were hanged. The jail became a symbol of ultimate sacrifice in India's struggle for freedom.

Rash Behari Bose managed to escape from India and reach Japan where, years later, he would lay the foundation of the Indian National Army (we will see it in action under Subhas Chandra Bose).

Jatin Mukherjee, nicknamed **Bagha Jatin** ('Bagha' means 'tiger', as Jatin once wrestled with a tiger with his bare hands), a leader of the Anushilan Samiti, collaborated with Rash Behari Bose in such plans. One of them, the so-called 'German Plot', consisted in organising the reception of a massive shipment of German arms and ammunition, which were due to come by ship.

These weapons were intended to start an armed insurrection while the British were occupied with World War I. Bagha Jatin organised the reception of the weapons, but the authorities got to know of the plan, forcing him and his companions to hide in the jungles of Balasore (in present-day Odisha), close to where the German weapons were supposed to land. On 9 September 1915, the revolutionaries were surrounded by a large contingent of British police and fought a 75-minute gunbattle from behind an anthill. A few were killed; severely wounded, Jatin passed away the next day. Those captured alive were soon hanged.

Such attacks, which invariably met with strong popular approval, rattled the colonial government, but, at the same time, hardened its resolve to rule with an iron hand.

Home Rule Movement and the Lucknow Pact

When Tilak was released from jail in 1914, his health had deteriorated, and the strongly militant atmosphere of the previous decade had faded away. He nevertheless set himself three tasks: to reconcile and reunite the two factions of the

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Congress; to promote Hindu–Muslim cooperation; and to work towards the ideal of home rule.

The first task was achieved in 1916 at the Lucknow session of the Congress. A step towards the second objective was taken at the same session, where an agreement (the so-called 'Lucknow Pact') was reached between the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League. Under the pact, the Congress accepted separate electorates for Muslims for elections to the provincial and central legislative councils, which had been set up decades earlier by the colonial government, but with very limited powers.

The same year, together with Annie Besant, an Irish philosopher, reformer and political activist who became a passionate supporter of Indian self-government, Tilak launched the Home Rule Movement, which called for self-government for India within the British Empire—it was no longer the full independence that the earlier Nationalists had demanded, but a measure of real internal autonomy which was perceived to be a practical first step. The British government, however, was not ready to concede even this demand. The struggle for freedom was thus poised to enter a new phase of mass political mobilisation.

Gandhi and the Non-Cooperation Movement

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbandar, Gujarat, in 1869. After finishing high school, he travelled to London to study law, then to South Africa, where he personally experienced racial discrimination against 'coloured' people and witnessed the hardships faced by the Indian community. This led him to conceive his method of 'satyagraha' ('insistence on truth'), based on passive resistance, nonviolence (or ahimsa) and acceptance of suffering in the quest for truth. All the while, Gandhi also kept abreast of developments in India.

Gandhi, who was by then addressed as 'Mahatma', returned to India in 1915 and, at Gopal Krishna Gokhale's advice, joined the Indian National Congress. Three years later, he applied his method of satyagraha to local grievances across India, such as

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those of indigo farmers in Bihar who were ruthlessly exploited (visit chapter 'The Colonial Era in India'), mill workers in Ahmedabad facing extremely low wages, and impoverished peasants in Kheda (Gujarat), from whom British officials demanded excessive land revenue. **Vallabhbhai Patel** led the Bardoli movement (1928) for peasant rights. It was one of the most successful grassroots movements in the freedom struggle. This led Mahatma Gandhi to bestow on him the title of 'Sardar'. And thus, he came to be known as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

The Non-Cooperation Movement

However, as the world celebrated the end of World War I (1914–1918), it brought no freedom to Indians. During the war, the colonial government supported the British war effort by exporting food to feed soldiers, causing food shortages in India; massive defence expenditures also drove up commodity prices. Besides, new laws imposed in 1919, the Rowlatt Act, enabled the police to detain anyone without trial; all forms of their civil liberties were effectively curtailed.



Fig. 2.21. Mahatma Gandhi spinning khadi

Gandhi launched a nationwide protest against the Rowlatt Act, conducting a day of prayer and fasting and urging Hindus and Muslims to unite in satyagraha. He promoted Swadeshi goods as a 'religious duty', and encouraged non-violent resistance through the boycott of foreign goods, schools, and courts — thus began the Non-Cooperation Movement, with Gandhi promising Swaraj within a year if people adhered strictly to nonviolence.

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With Tilak's death in August 1920, Gandhi became the undisputed mass leader of the Indian National Congress, which formally launched the Non-Cooperation Movement at its Nagpur session in December the same year. Many leaders, including Vallabhbhai Patel, expressed their support. Soon, the movement drew mass participation across India.

THINK ABOUT IT

Fig. 2.21 captures Mahatma Gandhi spinning khadi, that is, hand-spun, hand-woven yarn. (Cloth made of such yarn is called khadi cloth.) This was not just about making clothes; it was also a powerful symbol of Swadeshi, or self-reliance, a way to provide work for millions of impoverished villagers, and a direct challenge to British textile imports. It aimed to unite people economically and symbolically against foreign rule.

The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre and its Aftermath



Fig. 2.22. The Martyrs' Memorial in Jallianwala Bagh

On April 13, 1919, the peaceful garden of Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar became the site of a tragedy that would shake India to its core. Thousands of men, women, and children had gathered, some to celebrate the festival of Baisakhi, others to peacefully protest the arrest of local leaders and the repressive Rowlatt Act. Without warning, Brigadier-General Dyer and his troops sealed the main exit and opened fire on the unarmed crowd. For about ten minutes, 1,650 rounds of ammunition rained down, with the troops deliberately aiming at the thickest parts of the crowd and even at those trying to flee through other exits. Many were shot, some were trampled in the panic, and yet others leapt into a well to avoid the bullets.

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Official British counts admitted to nearly 400 dead and over 1,200 wounded, but Indian estimates placed the death toll at over 1,000. The massacre sent shockwaves across the country, permanently scarring public trust in the British government and uniting Indians of all backgrounds in their resolve to attain freedom. Dyer, who became known as the 'Butcher of Amritsar', proudly defended his action before a British-dominated inquiry committee, which condemned it, though without recommending any penal action. Following a general outcry, Dyer was ultimately removed from India. Up to this day, despite many requests, the British government has not apologised for this atrocity, only describing it as a 'deeply shameful event in British history'.

LET'S EXPLORE



Rabindranath Tagore sent a strong letter of protest to the then Viceroy. "The accounts of the insults and sufferings by our brothers in Punjab," wrote Tagore, "have trickled through the gagged silence, reaching every corner of India, and the universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of our people has been ignored by our rulers—possibly congratulating themselves for what they imagine as salutary lessons." In the same letter, Tagore returned the knighthood he had received from the British.

What does Tagore mean when he assumes that the colonial rulers 'congratulated themselves' after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre?

Punjab's then lieutenant governor, O'Dwyer, who had ruthlessly suppressed people's rights during his tenure, defended Dyer's action. Two decades after the massacre, Udham Singh, an Indian revolutionary and member of the Ghadar Party, tracked O'Dwyer in London and shot him dead. **Udham Singh** was arrested and hanged; during his trial, he asserted the legitimacy of his action.

The Khilafat Movement and its Aftermath

For some six centuries, the vast Turkish-led Ottoman Empire had spanned much of southeast Europe, western Asia, and north Africa. The empire's head, or 'sultan', ruling from Constantinople

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Fig. 2.23. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

(present-day Istanbul in Turkey) also served as the 'Caliph' (or 'Khalifa'), that is, the politico-religious leader of the Muslim world. At the end of World War I (1914–1918), the Ottoman Empire was dismembered; the position of the Caliph was now shaky.

In India, Muslim leaders such as Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, also known as the **Ali brothers**, and **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad** launched in 1919 the **Khilafat Movement**, which called for the Caliph's religious authority to be preserved. Gandhi saw there an opportunity to unite Hindus and Muslims against British rule and to bring Muslims into the nationalist fold. In 1920, an alliance was forged between Khilafat leaders and the Congress, with Gandhi and Khilafat leaders promising to fight together for both Khilafat and Swaraj. The movement merged with Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement and initially succeeded in increasing Muslim participation in the national movement and mobilising large numbers of Hindus for the Khilafat cause.

The movement also faced criticism on the ground. Some members of the Congress felt that the status of the Caliph in Turkey was of no concern to India and bringing this issue into the Non-Cooperation Movement was undesirable. A few Muslim leaders, such as Syed Ahmad Khan, were skeptical about the Khilafat Movement as it appeared to tie the loyalty of Indian Muslims to a religious power in faraway Turkey — 'territorial loyalty', as they called it. Jinnah, in fact, left the Congress at its 1920 session, after warning against mixing up the independence movement with religious elements.

In February 1922, at Chauri Chaura, a town in present-day Uttar Pradesh, protesters killed policemen by setting a station on fire. Viewing this as 'inhuman conduct', Gandhi abruptly called off the Non-Cooperation Movement, a decision which many in the Congress, including Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Chittaranjan Das, and Subhas Chandra Bose disapproved of. Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das created the

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Swaraj Party, which attempted a different strategy; owing to Das's death in 1925, it was short-lived.

As regards the Khilafat Movement, it died a natural death when Mustafa Kemal abolished the Turkish sultanate in 1922 and the Caliphate itself in 1924. Historians have debated the movement's aftermath. While temporarily uniting Hindus and Muslims, it also reinforced the sense of separateness among Indian Muslims and encouraged more radical Muslim leaders to come up with fresh demands. In fact, subsequent years saw quite a few Hindu-Muslim riots in several parts of the country.

Protests, Repression and Revenge

The British government was not blind to the growing popular discontent. It knew that if crores of Indians revolted, there was little it would be able to do. It kept trying to come up with reforms that would appear to be substantial concessions, yet without crossing a certain line towards home rule, much less independence. For instance, in 1927, the **Simon Commission** came to India to study constitutional reform, but without a single Indian member. Rallies and marches followed, with the slogan 'Simon Go Back!' echoing through city streets and black flags being waved as a sign of resistance.

In Lahore in October 1928, **Lala Lajpat Rai** led a nonviolent march which the police brutally lathi-charged (i.e., attacked with sticks). Badly injured, he managed to address a meeting the same evening, in which he declared, "The Government which attacks its own innocent subjects has no claim to be called a civilised government. Bear in mind, such a government does not survive long. I declare that the blows struck at me will be the last nails in the coffin of the British rule in India." Weakened by his injuries, Lala Lajpat Rai passed away two weeks later, which further inflamed national sentiment.



Fig. 2.24. A postage stamp honouring Lala Lajpat Rai

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The Simon Commission laid bare once again the refusal of the British to genuinely consult Indians about their own future, strengthening calls for complete self-rule.

More revolutionary actions

In disagreement with Gandhi's path of non-violence and its slow pace that was seen as not putting sufficient pressure on the colonial rulers, many freedom fighters believed that the use of force was a legitimate means to achieve independence.

The **Hindustan Republican Association** (HRA) was inspired by the Ghadar Movement's earlier attempts. To fund their revolutionary activities, a group, led by **Ram Prasad Bismil**, **Ashfaqulla Khan** and **Chandrashekhar Azad**, robbed a train that carried government money (the so-called 'Kakori Train Robbery', Kakori being a village near Lucknow). This action provoked a massive crackdown from the authorities, leading to the execution of Bismil, Khan and several others, all of whom turned into popular heroes at their trial.

The HRA reorganised itself as the **Hindustan Socialist Republican Association** (HSRA). Its leaders, Chandrashekar Azad and **Bhagat Singh**, were keen to avenge Lala Lajpat Rai's death. In December 1928, targeting a British police officer who had ordered the lathi charge on Lala Lajpat Rai, they assassinated a younger officer by mistake.



Fig. 2.25. Bhagat Singh, Ashfaqulla Khan, Chandrashekar Azad (L to R)

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A year later, Bhagat Singh and an associate dropped two low-intensity bombs in Delhi's Central Legislative Assembly; there were no victims, as the intention was only 'to make the deaf hear'. They also dropped pamphlets and shouted slogans calling for revolution and justice. Arrested and tried for the earlier assassination of a British officer, he went on a long hunger strike to protest against unjust treatment of Indian prisoners. Despite several appeals for clemency, Bhagat Singh and his associates Sukhdev Thapar and Shivaram Rajguru were hanged in 1931. They were 22 to 23 years old.

Bhagat Singh became a symbol of the resistance against the colonial oppressor. As Subhas Chandra Bose put it, just four days after the execution, "Bhagat Singh was a symbol of the spirit of revolt which has taken possession of the country from one end to the other. That spirit is unconquerable, and the flame which that spirit has lit up will not die."

There were many more such revolutionaries including women. Even schoolgirls took up arms against the British at this stage. In Comilla (in present-day Bangladesh), for example, **Suniti Chowdhury** and **Shanti Ghosh**, two students, assassinated a District Magistrate in 1931. A few months later, **Bina Das**, a student at Calcutta University, made a daring attempt on the life of the Governor of Bengal, during a convocation ceremony, but narrowly missed him; arrested, she stated in her confession that she wanted to free her country from the "perpetual subjection to infinite shame and endless suffering" caused by the British occupation. (She was sentenced to nine years of rigorous imprisonment.)



Fig. 2.26. Bina Das

Purna Swaraj and Civil Disobedience

In 1928, as a reaction to the Simon Commission, a report drafted under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru had called for India to be given 'Dominion status' — a status somewhat akin to the earlier 'Home Rule', that is, with total internal autonomy;

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Britain would still control India's military and foreign policy, and the British king or queen would still be the official head of state. At the time, Canada, Australia, and several other former colonies of the British Empire had the status of dominions. Now, with growing popular anger and the realisation that Britain was not ready to grant India such a status, the younger Congress leaders, such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, felt it was time for a more radical demand — '**Purna Swaraj**' or complete independence. This was not a completely new demand. Nationalist faction of the Congress had voiced it two decades earlier, and Aurobindo had raised a similar demand in 1908. Maulana Hasrat Mohani, a member of both the Congress and the All-India Muslim League, had called for it in 1921. A similar demand for Swaraj was expressed by V.D. Savarkar in 1925.

The resolution demanding Purna Swaraj was passed in December 1929 at the Lahore session of the Congress. Here is an extract from it:

> We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally, and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or complete independence.

To implement the demand for Purna Swaraj, Mahatma Gandhi launched the **Civil Disobedience Movement**. It began with the **Salt March** in March-April 1930, when Gandhi led a 380-km march to Dandi, a coastal village in southern Gujarat (which is why the march is also known as 'Dandi March'), where Gandhi symbolically collected some salt.

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LET'S EXPLORE

Form groups to analyse, compare and discuss the various elements or demands contained in the above resolution.



Fig. 2.27. The Lahore session of the Congress in progress (with Jawaharlal Nehru standing on the dais).



Fig. 2.28. A view of the Salt or Dandi March led by Mahatma Gandhi.

Since the colonial government held a monopoly on salt production and charged a high tax for it, Gandhi saw the breaking of the colonial salt law as an appropriate symbol in the fight against colonial rule.

Thousands were soon arrested, including Gandhi, but the Civil Disobedience Movement spread far and wide, with salt marches in other parts of the country, the boycott of foreign cloth, and the refusal to pay taxes. Large numbers of women broke the salt law, took part in processions and in the picketing of liquor shops and shops selling foreign cloth. A British report noted that 'thousands of women, many being of good family and high educational attainments, suddenly emerged from the seclusion of their homes, and, in some instances, actually from purdah (screen, veil), in order to join Congress demonstrations…"

One of them, **Sarojini Naidu,** a noted poet and powerful orator, was the first Indian woman president of the Congress in 1925.



Fig. 2.29. Sarojini Naidu with Mahatma Gandhi during the Dandi March

She was a strong advocate of women's rights — voting rights in particular — and actively participated in many protests, as a result of which she was arrested and imprisoned several times.

Repression and arrests followed the Salt March, and more atrocities: Peshawar, a city of the North-West Frontier Province (in present-day northern Pakistan), witnessed the Qissa Khwani Bazaar massacre on April 23, 1930, when British troops fired on a crowd peacefully protesting the arrest of their leader, **Abdul Ghaffar Khan**, who was committed to nonviolent methods. Even as the British used armoured cars and opened fire, killing hundreds, two platoons of the Royal Garhwal Rifles

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(British Indian Army soldiers) led by Chandra Singh Garhwali refused to fire on the unarmed crowd, choosing jail over hurting their fellow Indians.

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact

Keen to appease the growing protests, in 1931, Viceroy Irwin made an agreement with Gandhi: the government released political prisoners who had not been involved in violence and allowed a limited private manufacture of salt. In return, the Congress suspended civil disobedience and agreed to participate in a **Round Table Conference** in London. The pact marked the first formal negotiation between the British government and the Congress as equals, but the Round Table Conference failed to produce a breakthrough.



Fig. 2.30. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan with Mahatma Gandhi (1947)

The pact was criticised by younger Congress leaders as it did not guarantee Purna Swaraj. Gandhi tried to resume the Civil Disobedience Movement, but the British responded with massive arrests, and public enthusiasm was now missing. Gandhi withdrew the movement in 1934, after



Fig. 2.31. The Round Table Conference in 1931. Gandhi is seated next to the chairman; Ambedkar is fourth from the left in the foreground.

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which the Congress turned to constitutional methods, seeking substantial concessions through complex negotiations. In 1935, the British conceded some degree of provincial autonomy. The reform allowed for elected governments at the provincial level, although the colonial powers retained much control, including foreign affairs, defence, and internal security. The British-appointed governors could also indefinitely take over provincial administration.

During that time, Gandhi focused more on social reforms, specifically his campaign against untouchability, i.e. the discrimination suffered by those rejected by the caste system — earlier called 'Untouchables' or, in the official terminology, 'Depressed Classes'; the Indian Constitution refers to them as 'Scheduled Castes'. While the social reformer **B.R. Ambedkar**, who had himself suffered such discrimination, shared this goal, he believed that keeping separate electorates for the Depressed Classes was the only way to ensure their political voice. Gandhi, on the other hand, feared this would permanently divide Hindu society and began a 'fast unto death' in protest. A compromise was reached in the so-called 'Poona Pact', which, instead of separate electorates, increased the number of reserved seats for the Depressed Classes in the legislatures.

The Idea of Separate Nations

Muslims generally kept away from the Civil Disobedience Movement. When **Muhammad Iqbal**, a philosopher and poet of Urdu, presided over the 1930 All-India Muslim League session in Allahabad (present-day Prayagraj), he proposed a separate territory for Muslims in northwestern India, which would enable Muslims to preserve their culture and religious identity within a larger Indian federation. While this was not yet the precise idea of Pakistan (the word was coined a few years later), this intensified the debate about separateness.

While nearly all Congress leaders, including Muslim leaders such as Maulana Azad and Abdul Ghaffar Khan, opposed the Two-Nation idea, insisting that Hindus and Muslims could live together and sort out their differences, Jinnah endorsed the idea of Pakistan.

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A few Hindu organisations, such as the Hindu Mahasabha under V.D. Savarkar, saw Hindus and Muslims as two distinct nations living side by side. Though without explicitly asking for a partition between the two.

World War II and the Indian National Army

As Europe plunged into another devastating war in 1939, which soon engulfed most countries of the world, India found herself pulled into it without being consulted. World War II put an enormous strain on India. More than 2.5 million Indian soldiers joined the war, forming the largest volunteer army in history. According to official figures, at least 87,000 of these troops lost their lives in the field. At home, everyday life became harder — the war caused shortages of food and goods, high taxes, and, because much Indian grain was sent abroad to the war front on the orders of Winston Churchill, then prime minister of the United Kingdom, a horrific famine struck Bengal in 1943, with millions perishing.

While support for the British was initially widespread, many Indians began to feel that they were making huge sacrifices for a war that was not their own, yet their own freedom continued to be denied.

Subhas Chandra Bose, once a Congress leader, broke away from Gandhi's policies of nonviolence, convinced that freedom would come only through armed struggle. Since raising an army in India was unrealistic, Bose decided to seek help from Britain's enemies during World War II. Escaping house arrest in India in early 1941, he travelled through Afghanistan and Russia to reach Germany, where he spent almost two years and sought support from the anti-British forces.



Fig. 2.32. Subhas Chandra Bose

Having decided that he stood a better chance with Japan (Germany's ally against Britain and most European nations), he travelled

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to Indonesia, Japan, and finally Singapore in 1943, where he formed the **Indian National Army** (INA) from Indian prisoners of war and volunteers, and declared the formation of the **Azad Hind** ('free India') **government**. As Japan expanded the war into Southeast Asia, the INA fought alongside the Japanese army in Burma and northeastern India, particularly Manipur and Nagaland. They were militarily defeated, and the INA failed to establish a base in India. While many in India admired Bose's courageous defiance, others criticised his alliance with Nazi Germany and Japan.

The Quit India Movement

In the thick of World War II, Churchill, under pressure to seek India's support, sent Stafford Cripps to India with an offer. The '**Cripps Mission**' of 1942 promised to grant India dominion status once the war was over, but with a provision that provinces could opt out of the post-war India, if they so wished. A few Congress leaders, like **C. Rajagopalachari**, favoured acceptance for tactical reasons, but most leaders, including Gandhi, found



Fig. 2.33. Atrocities committed on common people during the Quit India movement, August 1942

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the assurances contained in the proposal insufficient and ended up rejecting it.

In August 1942, Mahatma Gandhi launched the **Quit India Movement** with a simple call to Indians: "Do or Die." The demand was clear — the British must leave India at once. Even though virtually the entire leadership of the Congress was arrested, the popular movement continued, and mass protests and rallies erupted nationwide with 'Quit India' banners. Workers went on strike, students left schools, people attacked government buildings and uprooted telegraph poles. Leaders like Ram Manohar Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan were instumental in keeping the underground movement going. The protest reached such a scale that Viceroy Linlithgow called it "by far the most serious rebellion since 1857". Although it was brutally suppressed, with many deaths and numerous arrests across India, it sent a strong message to the British that they could no longer rule India without Indian consent.



DON'T MISS OUT

Aruna Asaf Ali, who had earlier taken part in many protests and suffered solitary confinement as a result, played an important role in the Quit India Movement. When senior Congress leaders were arrested, she hoisted the national flag at the Gowalia Tank Maidan in Bombay, becoming a powerful symbol of resistance. She then went underground for nearly four years, evading capture despite being declared a dangerous outlaw with a bounty on her head. During this period, she edited underground bulletins and helped coordinate secret resistance activities against British rule. She later supported the Royal Indian Navy mutiny of February 1946.



Fig. 2.34. A postage stamp honouring Aruna Asaf Ali

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Kanaklata Barua, a teenage independence activist from Assam, became a prominent martyr of the Quit India Movement in 1942. At just 17 years old, she was shot and killed by British police while leading a procession to hoist the Indian national flag at the local police station in Gohpur. Known as 'Birangana' ('heroic woman'), she is honoured as one of the youngest icons of India's struggle for freedom.



THINK ABOUT IT

During the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920–22, some 40,000 participants were jailed for various terms. The Salt Satyagraha of 1930 saw over 60,000 people jailed and a large number brutalised by the police. The Civil Disobedience Movement during 1931–34 saw another 40,000 freedom fighters jailed. During the Quit India Movement of 1942–45, over 100,000 freedom fighters were imprisoned and nearly 10,000 killed during the brutal repression of the movement.

You need not remember these figures. However, conduct a class discussion about their significance in terms of the huge collective sacrifice suffered by the Indian people.

Partition, Turmoil, and Independence

World War II ended in 1945 with a decisive victory of the Allies (in particular the U.S.A., the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and China) over the 'Axis' (Germany, Italy and Japan). Many European powers realised they could no longer hold on to their colonies; an era of decolonisation began. Britain, exhausted by the war, finally sought a transition towards India's independence.

Besides, January 1946 witnessed a **mutiny in the Royal Indian Air Force** involving many thousands of personnel. The next month, a mutiny started in the **Royal Indian Navy** in Bombay, when naval ratings (sailors) rebelled against ill-treatment, and quickly spread across India. While the rebellion was eventually called off, it sent a strong signal to the British that they could no longer rely on the Indian military to maintain their empire.

Finally, the **Cabinet Mission** of 1946 sought to plan a peaceful transfer of power, dividing India into three groups of provinces,

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each of which had complete autonomy except in matters of defence, foreign affairs and communication. Complex talks followed, but deep divisions between the Congress and the Muslim League led to a deadlock.

'Direct Action'

In particular, the demand for a separate Muslim state grew intense. Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League, openly declared a break from constitutional methods and called for 'Direct Action Day' on August 16, 1946, urging Muslims to demonstrate for the cause of Pakistan. He stated, "We will either have a divided India or a destroyed India." A wave of brutal communal violence submerged Calcutta — often encouraged by provocative speeches and pamphlets — leading to thousands of deaths as Muslim mobs attacked Hindus, who then retaliated. Thousands more were displaced. The violence created a deep sense of fear, making peaceful coexistence seemingly impossible and partition unavoidable.

To manage the transition from British rule, an **Interim Government** led by Jawaharlal Nehru took charge in September 1946, but tensions remained high. Behind the scenes, hurried negotiations and mounting pressures pushed the British to make a quick exit.

The Partition of India

The British had for decades encouraged Hindu Muslim differences to grow. The partition of India resulted from disagreements between the two communities or rather small sections. The partition plan was widely opposed even by the Indian National Congress. There was no national consensus. Whether it was the only way forward is an issue that has been debated ever since.

In July 1947, Mountbatten, British India's last Viceroy, who had recently come to India with a mandate to chart a path to the transfer of power, chose Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer unfamiliar with India, and gave him just five weeks to draw new borders—resulting in the **Radcliffe Line**, which split Punjab and Bengal almost overnight. This boundary created two countries: a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan, which

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included West Pakistan (now Pakistan) and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh, independent since 1971). Millions suddenly found themselves on the 'wrong' side of these lines, with their homes, friends, and sacred places now across international borders.

The partition in August 1947 unleashed unprecedented chaos, leading to the migration of millions and to widespread violence. This tragedy was fuelled not only by deep mistrust between communities, but also by a rushed and poorly planned boundary line and a total breakdown of law and order. Horrific massacres erupted, with organised gangs, rumours, and a desire to 'cleanse' new territories of minorities driving much of the bloodshed. Women were especially targeted, facing abductions and assaults.

Gandhi lamented, "The attitude of violence we have secretly harboured comes back on us, and we fly at each other's throats when the question of distribution of power arises... Now that the yoke of subjection is lifted, all the forces of evil have come to the surface." The legacy of Partition still shapes relations and memories across the subcontinent today.

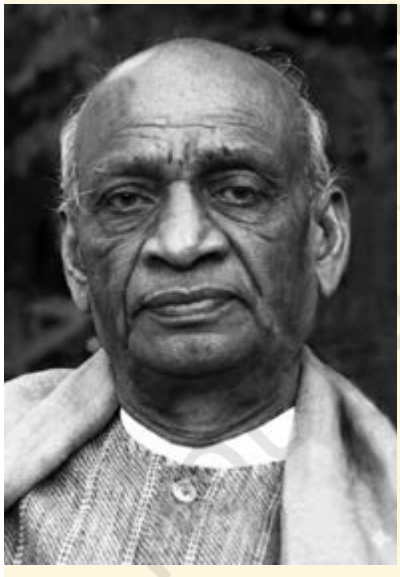


Fig. 2.35. Vallabhbhai Patel

Remember that India had over 560 Princely States that were not directly ruled by the colonial power. When the British announced their departure, these states were given the option to join either India or Pakistan; they were also technically free to remain independent. This was a classic colonial step to destroy the integrity of India. Sardar Patel had always believed that states were an integral part of India, which has evolved over ages. Both before and after Independence, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel used a mix of persuasion and firmness to integrate these states. While most joined peacefully, he used military action as a last resort for the few that refused or delayed merger. Patel's efforts ensured that modern India became a geographically unified nation. Thus, he came to be known as the 'Iron Man of India'.

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Fig. 2.36. A special train carrying refugees at Ambala Station during the Partition. Such trains were so crowded that hundreds had to travel on the roof.

With independence on August 15, 1947, India finally awoke to freedom at midnight. Yet the joy was shadowed by sorrow, as Partition brought violence and displacement on an unprecedented scale. A new government, led by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Governor-General Mountbatten, took charge of the new nation and also began the daunting task of building democratic institutions. The Indian Army, still largely structured under British command with Indian officers gradually stepping into leadership, symbolised both continuity and transition in the new republic. Independence thus came as both a triumph of hope and the beginning of an immense responsibility to heal, rebuild, and realise the promise of self-rule for millions.

Historians have debated the causes for Britain's exit from India. The earlier view was that it was mostly thanks to Gandhi, his doctrine of nonviolence, and the Congress's policies. This view has given way to a recognition that multiple other factors were also at work — the popular uprisings, the numerous attempts by revolutionaries, the mutinies in the Royal Indian Air Force

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and the Royal Indian Navy. Also, Britain's diminished status after World War II, and the worldwide trend towards decolonisation — the age of empires was over, at least in that form.

THINK ABOUT IT



As we said at the beginning, this chapter can only mention very few of those who fought for India's liberation from colonial rule. Many more names would have deserved a mention. For instance, Acchamma Cherian, Achyutrao Patwardhan, Agarkar, Alluri Sitarama Raju, Anjana Devi Chaudhury, B.S. Moonje, Bhai Parmanand, Bhikaiji Cama, Bhogesvari Phukanani, C.F. Andrews, Dhondo Karve, Ganesh Srikrishna Khaparde, Ganjan Singh Korku, Gopinath Bordoloi, Gopalrao Deshmukh, Govind Giri, Harohalli Srinivasaiah Doreswamy, Jatindra Nath Das, Jayaprakash Narayan, Kanneganti Hanumanthu, Kasturba Gandhi, Kushal Konwar, Kuttimalu Amma, Lakshman Nayak, Lakshmi Sahgal, M.N. Roy (Manabendra Nath), Madan Lal Dhingra, Matangini Hazra, Mirabehn (Madeleine Slade), Pandit Kanshi Ram, Pingali Venkayya, Pritilata Waddedar, Rajendra Prasad, Govind Ballabh Pant, Sridev Suman, Baji Rout, Mahaveer Tyagi, H.N. Bahuguna, Rani Gaidinliu, Sardar Ajit Singh, Seth Govind Das, Shivram Rajguru, Sister Nivedita, Surya Sen, Tara Rani Srivastava, Thiruppur Kumaran, Usha Mehta, Umaji Naik, Umakant Prasad Sinha, Vasudeo Balwant Phadke, V. Ramaswamy Aiyangar, V.V.S. Aiyar.

You need not memorise this list. However, see if you can add any other name to the list. Besides, the support and sacrifice made by the women belonging to the families of the freedom fighters also needs to be acknowledged with gratitude.

From 1857 to 1947 — for 90 long years — generations of Indians fought, suffered and sacrificed themselves for this objective. From revolutionaries to farmers, every act of defiance of the colonial rule contributed to weaving the tapestry of independence. Though history records only a few names (and our chapter so very few of those), India's freedom was a hard-won, collective victory. The question now confronting all was — What sort of nation will free India build?

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Before we move on ...



- India's struggle for independence from colonial rule was long, complex, with ups and downs and immense suffering and sacrifice.
- There were multiple approaches to this objective: Moderates, who aspired to a degree of autonomy for India within the British Empire, and hoped that gradual reforms would suffice; Nationalists, who worked towards independence and worked for mass awakening through the methods of Swaraj, Swadeshi and boycott; revolutionaries, who believed that violent acts would unsettle the colonial powers and lead to an armed uprising; Gandhi's nonviolence and method of satyagraha and mass mobilisation; and a few more.
- The movement unified the subcontinent, but could not resolve the political Hindu-Muslim question, as some Muslim leaders (not all of them) insisted on separateness between the two religious groups.
- The journey to freedom left a complex legacy of both triumph and tragedy. While 1947 brought the joy of independence, the Partition, with its widespread violence and displacement, left a deep scar.

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Questions and activities

The following are suggested activities to choose from.

- **True or False.** Find out whether the following statements are true or false:
  1. Right from its inception, the Indian National Congress called for India's independence.
  2. Bal Gangadhar Tilak turned a Shivaji festival into a popular event.
  3. The Ghadar Movement of 1914–15 aimed to start a mutiny within the British Indian Army while British troops were busy with World War I.

4. Vallabhbhai Patel earned the title ‘Sardar’ for his leadership during the Satyagraha agitation in Gujarat.
5. The Kakori train robbery of 1925 was carried out to fund the activities of the Hindustan Republican Association.
6. The ‘Do or Die’ call was given by Mahatma Gandhi during the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920.
7. B.R. Ambedkar and Gandhi were in total agreement regarding the issue of ‘separate electorates’ for Dalits.
8. Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to India in 1942 because Winston Churchill supported immediate independence for India.
9. Subhas Chandra Bose raised an army during his stay in Germany.
10. The Radcliffe Line, which divided India and Pakistan, was announced a few weeks before Independence Day.

- **Who Am I?** Can you identify these figures?
  1. Known as the ‘Lion of Punjab’, I was severely injured during a brutal lathi charge while protesting against the Simon Commission.
  2. I famously declared, ‘Swaraj is my birthright, and I shall have it!’ I used the *Kesari* newspaper and festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi to unite people against British rule.
  3. I was a leader of the Nationalist faction of the Congress. In the daily *Bande Mataram*, I wrote on the need for India to attain absolute autonomy.
  4. I earned my nickname ‘Bagha’ after wrestling a tiger with my bare hands. I was a revolutionary leader who died in a gunfight at while waiting for a shipment of German arms to start an uprising.
  5. I organised the daring attempt to throw a bomb at the Viceroy in 1912. I later escaped to Japan, where I spent years working to organise a movement from there.

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6. I was martyred at a young age after an attempt on the life of a British judge.
7. I was martyred at a young age after throwing non-lethal bombs in Delhi's Central Legislative Assembly.
8. I turned the freedom struggle into a mass movement through the principles of ahimsa and satyagraha, leading campaigns such as the Dandi March.
9. I sought help from the Axis powers during World War II to organise the Indian National Army.
10. A British lawyer, I was given just five weeks to draw the boundary line that would partition the Indian subcontinent into two separate nations.

- What kinds of sacrifices are needed to achieve freedom? Think about the lives of Indian soldiers during wars, families suffering during famines, leaders and ordinary people who were arrested, and countless others who lost their homes and safety while participating in protests. If you were living during India's freedom struggle, would you have chosen to participate in it? What comforts, opportunities, or personal goals might you have been willing to give up for a cause you strongly believed in?
- What values does Tilak's statement, "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it," reflect? Can these values be meaningful for young people today?
- How did peasants, workers, tribals, and students contribute to the national movement in ways different from political leaders?
- Discuss in class this extract from Nehru's speech on 15 August 1947:

  "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance…"

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What is meant by “redeem our pledge”? How would you define the ‘soul of a nation’?

- Imagine you are a freedom fighter.
  a) Explain the method you support to achieve freedom.
  b) Discuss with your classmates any other method they would support. Be respectful in your debate.
  c) What does this debate teach us about unity and disagreement?
- Write a news report based on an important event in the Freedom Movement (Swadeshi, boycott, satyagraha, Non-Cooperation, Quit India, or Partition).
  a) Write a headline.
  b) Include one interview or public reaction.
  c) Explain why this event was important.
- Imagine you are part of a team creating a small museum exhibition on India’s freedom struggle for students of your age.
  a) Choose a title for your exhibit.
  b) Select three objects (for example: a letter, a photograph, a newspaper, a prison diary — you can add to these examples) and explain what each object represents.
  c) Write a short note on what visitors should learn or feel after seeing this exhibit.
- As a class activity, write and stage a small play or skit based on the Freedom Movement.
- India achieved freedom after great sacrifice. What responsibilities do citizens have today to protect and strengthen this freedom? Write 5 to 10 lines.

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